

Update on Staff Testing (05.28.20)

I am writing with an update on our plans for comprehensive staff testing. The IMT has been working with the Minnesota Department of Health this week to put that plan together. We are now ready to begin including staff testing as part of our broad based strategy to combat COVID-19 across the DOC.

Beginning **Tuesday, June 2**, we will begin comprehensive testing of all facility staff. We will focus our efforts on those currently working in facilities on a regular basis. We will begin testing next Tuesday at Lino Lakes and will develop a schedule to cover each facility over the next few weeks based on criteria and guidance from the MN Department of Health (MDH). We also continue working on plans to sustain ongoing staff testing at all facilities during the pandemic.

A few points of emphasis:

- It is critical that we achieve as close as possible to full participation in testing. As we have seen in prisons, nursing homes, and other congregate living facilities around the country, it can take only a single person to potentially impact large portions of entire facilities.
- You will conduct your own test. With observation from a trained staff member, you will be given a cotton swab and provided instructions for how to collect a testable sample from just inside your nostril. Note these tests are **not** what some have referred to as “brain scrape” tests that require a sample be collected four inches inside a person’s nose. This new test being used by the Mayo Clinic simply goes just inside your nose.
- The test samples will be secured and sent to the Mayo Clinic for testing. We have contracted with Health Partners to deliver **positive** test results via phone call. DOC will be notified of negative test results and Human Resources will deliver those results via email.
- Test result data will be treated as private, protected health information. Only authorized individuals will have access to the information.
- You will be subject to **no** adverse employment action of any kind based on the test results. If you test positive, you will be on paid leave for the appropriate amount of time based on MDH protocol.
- Testing for staff will be mandatory. If for some reason a person chooses not to be tested, they will be sent home without pay until they are tested. As noted above, we simply must test everyone coming into the facility on a regular basis if testing is to be an effective tool in our broader strategy.

We are thankful to have received guidance from public health experts at the Department of Health about the most effective way to incorporate testing into our strategy. MDH posted suggested testing protocols for prisons and jails on their website, and we are following them closely. You can view them here: <https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/testingjail.pdf>. I have also attached a memo from MDH outlining the importance of testing in correctional facilities.

As the Commissioner told you last week, regular, widespread testing and tracing is central to our overall strategy of combating COVID-19 within the DOC. The longer infection goes undetected, the more risk there is of others getting infected. The longer infection goes undetected, the more risk there is of some getting seriously ill and overwhelming our local clinics and hospitals. Especially as our state begins to reopen, it is critical we detect pockets of infection to keep the virus from spreading.

I recognize this message will not answer all of your questions. More specific instructions will be provided to you as your facility or unit is scheduled for staff testing. As always you can direct questions you do have to IMT: IMT.DOC@state.mn.us.

Please continue to take care of yourself. I know you will continue to follow the simple strategies for infection prevention. But please also, get rest, eat well, get some exercise, and turn off the news when it becomes too much.

Michelle Smith
Deputy Commissioner